

Intel No. 1 for helping workers with commutes

By Traci Watson
USA TODAY

The federal government releases a list Wednesday lauding Fortune 500 companies that make a major effort to ease commutes for their employees, which helps ease traffic congestion and air pollution.

The EPA rated the companies by how many employees are offered incentives not to drive alone to work. Eligible incentives included the chance to work from home and financial subsidies for public transit. Companies also had to make sure employees had a ride home in an emergency.

Intel makes benefits available to nearly 90% of its 48,000-person U.S. workforce.

A place on the list gives companies bragging rights and a chance to use the program's logo for recruiting. Some companies use the slogan in help-wanted ads, and some have seen a decline in staff turnover.

Many of the companies on the list have long offered generous benefits to make commuting easier. Others, such as Wyeth, beefed up their commuting benefits when the EPA announced the program in the spring.

But workers who carpool or take a bus to work are rare. More than 75% of U.S. workers get to work by driving alone, compared with 64% in 1980. Average delays per driver in the 85 biggest U.S. cities have risen to 46 hours a year in 2002 from 16 hours in 1982, according to the Texas Transportation Institute.

The EPA calculates that the benefits offered by the companies on the list save 450 million miles of driving a year. The companies' programs also prevent the release of 186,000 tons of the main gas linked to global warming, which is equivalent to emissions from about 41,000 cars a year.

Transportation experts say the program will help change workers' attitudes about how to get to work. But the EPA has tried similar programs in the past without reversing the rising percentage of Americans who drive to work alone.

"People just go for the flexibility of the auto," says Michael Demetsky of the University of Virginia, who thinks the program's effect will be "marginal."

But the effectiveness of the EPA program doesn't matter to some workers who get the kind of benefits the EPA is encouraging.

John Myers, an engineer at Intel, calculates that he saves \$2,000 in gasoline a year and more than 14,000 miles on his pickup by carpooling several times a week to his office, which is more than 70 miles from his home. He also gets an extra 200 hours of sleep a year by napping when he's not the carpool driver.

Plus, he says, he's "a lot less cranky" when he gets home to his wife. "That," he says, "saves me countless dollars on flowers."

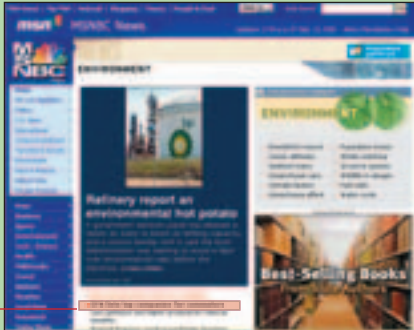
Best workplaces for commuters		
1. Intel	Computers	Santa Clara, Calif.
2. Fannie Mae	Real estate	Washington
3. Cisco	Communications	San Jose
4. USAA	Financial	San Antonio
5. Sun Microsystems	Computers	Broomfield, Colo.
6. Oracle	Computer software	Redwood City, Calif.
7. Advanced Micro Devices	Electronics	Austin
8. Texas Instruments	Semiconductors	Dallas
9. Safeco	Insurance	Seattle
10. EMC	Data storage	Hopkinton, Mass.
Source: Environmental Protection Agency		
* See the list of all 69 companies at money.usatoday.com		

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EPA lists top companies for commuters

Less pollution and higher productivity cited as benefits

MSNBC News Services

September 29, 2004

WASHINGTON - Intel, Fannie Mae and Cisco Systems top the U.S. government's list of largest companies that have the best commuting benefits for their employees.

The list, issued for the first time by the Environmental Protection Agency, ranks those companies that have subsidized transit or vanpool passes, telecommuting programs, bike lockers and showers, and other outstanding commuter benefits.

Congestion created from commuting to and from work wastes 5.7 billion gallons of fuel and 3.5 billion hours of lost productivity a year, costing the nation \$63.2 billion, the EPA estimates.

Every year, the top 20 companies in the list have reduced driving 250 million miles of driving, saved over 12 million gallons of gasoline and prevented more than 186,000 tons of global warming pollution, according to the EPA.

"By offering their employees commuter benefits, companies are improving employee recruiting and retention, increasing employee job satisfaction ... and they are also reducing air pollution and congestion," said Jeff Holmstead, EPA's assistant administrator of air and radiation.

The list is a first for the EPA, which intends to offer it each year.

Companies that make the EPA list offer at least three different types of commuter benefits to 15 percent or more of their employees, said Margo Oge, director of the agency's Office of Transportation and Air Quality.

"Through this program we can have significant environmental benefits like saving fuel and reducing pollution, greenhouse gases and congestion," she said.

Companies can deduct up to \$100 a month in commuting expenses they provide to each employee. Workers do not have to treat the benefit as income.

To qualify as one of the best workplaces for commuters, a company must be on the Fortune 500 list and provide:

- At least one primary commuter benefit such as a monthly transit/vanpool pass subsidy or a significant telecommuting program.
- At least three supporting commuter benefits, including carpool/vanpool incentives, lockers/showers for bikers or walkers, incentives to live near work, or onsite amenities such as day care or dry cleaning.
- A central point of contact who actively informs employees of available commuter benefits.
- Access to a regional or employer-provided guaranteed emergency ride home program.

To get the top spot on the list, Intel offers commuter benefits to almost 90 percent of its work force.

Additional information is online at www.bwc.gov.

** Reuters and The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

Paving the Road for Telecommuters

The EPA is singing the praises of outfits that are helping to cut cutting pollution by encouraging employees to work from home

NEWS ANALYSIS

By Burt Helm

Here's a notice from the Environmental Protection Agency that won't give Corporate America fits. On Sept. 29, the agency released its first annual 20 Best Workplaces for Commuters, which were selected from the 500 largest U.S. companies. Topping the list: Intel (INTC), which offers van-pooling, fitness centers, and volleyball courts at its Folsom, Calif., headquarters, as well as an extended telecommuting option in certain circumstances. Some 75% of Intel employees take advantage of the plan at one time or another in their careers.

Most of those topping the EPA's list are tech outfits, with Cisco (CSCO), Sun Microsystems (SUNW), Oracle (ORCL), AMD (AMD), and Texas Instruments (TXN) all in the top 10. And rather than simply subsidizing employees' bus passes or coordinating carpools, many outfits are enabling workers to stay at home on a full-time basis. That's long been taboo in corporate circles, but "the culture is changing," says Jim Sinocchi of IBM (IBM), which the survey ranked in 16th place. On any given day, approximately 128,000 IBM employees telecommute, either from a customer site or their homes, says Sinocchi, who adds that the program has trimmed Big Blue's office rentals.

Sun, which came in fifth, is redefining the very idea of what constitutes a normal office with its iWork program. Not only can employees telecommute, they also can bring up their own desktop computer on any PC in any Sun office. iWork technology "automatically gives you a connection to anywhere in the enterprise," says Sun CIO Bill Dass. "You can work [from home] until traffic dies down, drive to Sun, and go back to work."

CHAINED TO THE WHEEL. Of Sun's 36,100 employees, roughly 16,000 on the iWork plan don't have specific offices while another 1,000 work full-time from home. Echoing the sentiment at IBM, Sun says the policy saves on office-space costs, with Dass adding that employees are more productive because they work during what would otherwise be commuting time.

For about five years, third-ranked Cisco Systems has supplied all employees with home broadband. At the office, Cisco also provides on-site services like dry cleaning, a carwash, even dentists, so that employees can take care of chores that would otherwise keep them away from their desks.

The survey is an expansion of a 2001 regional program the EPA began in order to recognize large employers providing commuter benefits like transit subsidies, car-pool programs, and telecommuting options. Small wonder the EPA sees this as a cause worth pushing. According to 2000 U.S. Census data, the number of workers who car-pool declined from 19.7% in 1980 to 12.2% in 2000. While the percentage of people who worked from home has risen slightly, from 2.3% to 3.3%, the average commute in America has increased to 25.5 minutes, from 21.7 minutes in 1980. Three out of four Americans are still the sole occupants of the cars that take them to and from work.

EVERYONE WINS. The EPA hopes its rankings will encourage Corporate America's greater involvement in efforts to cut vehicle exhaust emissions. Companies that get on the EPA list can feature their Best Workplace awards on corporate Web sites and in recruitment literature. "It's a win-win," says Margo Oge, the EPA's director of transportation and air quality. "Many can save money by reducing parking-space costs while they reduce air pollution" and traffic congestion. Intel, EMC (EMC), IBM, Hewlett Packard (HPQ), and Wyeth Pharmaceuticals (WYE) all added commuter benefits to increase their chances of appearing on the list, according to an EPA insider.

In order to make the EPA's top 20, companies generally must offer at least one kind of mass-transit or van-pool subsidy, be involved in a transportation management association, provide a telecommuting option, and make available onsite amenities like a gym. Sixty-nine of the top 500 largest companies in America satisfied the requirements, according to the EPA. It sure beats regulation.